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Finding My Place Among the Grits and Liver Mush

Office of University Communications

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Finding My Place Among the Grits and Liver Mush

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Office of University
Communications

July 13, 2016

By Erik Barr '16, Intern for University Communications

One of my first experiences at Gardner-Webb University was trying to “pull” on a door clearly marked “push.” As a master of first impressions, I was trying to go into the Snack Shop restaurant across the street from campus with a small group of people I had just met. One of the waitresses, hiding a smirk, motioned for me to push. Embarrassed, I walked in and sat down with my new friends.

Looking at the menu, I felt like I was reading
an entirely new language. Corned beef hash?

Grits? Liver mush? Where was I? I made eye contact with one of the girls in the group. She, like me, was also from the North. She, like me, had no idea if liver mush was actually an edible dish.

The situation at the Snack Shop, among others, is why I often use the term “fish out of water” when referring to my experience at Gardner-Webb. The environment was not much different from the one I had in Pennsylvania, yet I felt like a totally different person in the tight-knit community I had chosen to join. Luckily for me and countless others, Gardner-Webb is more than willing to look past differences to happily welcome anyone in the community.

Being a Pittsburgh, Pa., native, people constantly ask, “What made you choose Gardner-Webb?” During junior and senior years at my high school, all students had to take guidance classes, which was a fancy way of saying “you’re almost done with high school and we need to talk about what that means for all of you.” Part of that, for those so inclined, was researching colleges and properly preparing to apply. As intensely slow and tedious as the process was—imagining the bright blue College Board website still makes my eyeballs cringe—one amazing thing came out of the process: seeing and visiting Gardner-Webb.

While the new environment and potential for new experiences made GWU stand out to me, my familial ties in Statesville, N.C., would be there if I needed somewhere to go. Most importantly, it gave my mother peace of mind. GWU also had the majors I wanted along with a few backup choices. However, one of the perks of Gardner-Webb was that I did not need either of those “in case of” situations. I always felt at home in the community, and I never needed to consider another major after stepping foot into the English department. Writing has always been my passion, and with all the outlets Gardner-Webb offers, I had countless opportunities to better my writing and communication skills. I became involved

in Sigma Tau Delta, the English honor society, which opened the door to organizing and participating in events such as National Novel Writing Month and More Love Letters. Outside of the English department, I had projects, mainly in the communications department, which blended traditional teaching methods with real-world application. Projects in my public relations classes would require us to seek an actual public relations team to see how they function.

What surprised me the most about attending school here was that I stayed. Before arriving on campus, I had planned on transferring to another school. I love change and going to new environments, so I wanted to capitalize on my ability to do so before being an adult anchored me to one place. Places like California and England were calling my name. However, with each day I was at Gardner-Webb, I found it harder and harder to tell myself I had to leave.

Craig Hall—and the English department held within—became my home. I loved every single one of my professors, I loved what I was learning, and I loved the activities they held. Dr. Janet Land in particular—between teaching her literary theory class, mentoring me with my thesis, and being a beloved professor that seemed to do everything—encouraged and challenged me to find my writing voice and refine my individual style. Talking openly and being able to be myself both with her and at Gardner-Webb was invaluable to my growth as a student and a person. More than ever, I feel prepared to succeed with the help from my GWU family.

Gardner-Webb also did an amazing job at giving me skills and experience to take with me into a career. One of the goals of the English department is to construct a professional writing portfolio to share with potential employers. Aside from that, I gained work experience when my professors recommended me for a position at GWU's writing center, a job I held until I graduated. I learned the skills for my area of focus in the English and communication departments, how to effectively market my professional image with the career services office, and how to improve upon my own sense of self as an active member of a welcoming community.

Being so readily included at GWU assured me that even though I'm still not sure liver mush is an edible dish, I am able to be a part of an intimate community that greets new people with loving, open arms.

Located in Boiling Springs, N.C., Gardner-Webb University offers a comprehensive academic experience that introduces undergraduate and graduate students to the diverse world of ideas and to the people who think them, challenging students spiritually and intellectually and equipping them not only for professional success but for lives marked with empathy, compassion and a commitment to service on the broadest scale, Pro Deo et Humanitate (For God and Humanity).